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**LATIN AMERICA'S EPISTEMIC BREAK:
TOWARDS A DECOLONIAL AESTHETICS**

Dissertation

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Table of contents

I	INTRODUCTION _____	3
II	BACKGROUND _____	5
III	LOCATING POSITIONS _____	11
IV	TOWARDS ‘AN OTHER FEELING’ DECOLONISING AESTHETICS _____	18
V	DECOLONIALITY VERSUS ALTERMODERNITY? _____	25
VI	DECOLONIAL VISIONS: BEGINNING _____	34
VII	DECOLONIAL VISIONS: SECOND STAGE _____	43
VIII	FINAL CONSIDERATIONS _____	53
	REFERENCE LIST _____	58

I. - Introduction

During the 1970s the colonial question took central stage in academic debates. Such debates are responsible for 'postcolonial studies', which main goal is to explain the relationship between the formation of knowledge on the colonies and ex-colonies and the exercise of power towards them. Postcolonialism comprises a set of approaches that consists of reactions to the cultural legacy of colonialism and advocates for colonized countries, both in the recognition of their own identity, and in their effective incorporation, in their own right, into the so-called 'global world'. In the vein of these discourses, Latin American thought began to make itself heard from various North American universities, initiating the revision of its contemporary theories¹, and creating the *Latin American Subaltern Studies Group*². In their inaugural presentation, the group declared that it was inspired by a similar organization, dedicated to South-Asian studies and headed by Ranajit Guha, whose critique put into relief the persistence of the colonial legacy in the systems established by modernity. Later, a new approach is developed within the Latin American context that begins to analyse the present repercussions of the colonial past and proposes the reformulation of its own traditions. The work of Modernity/Coloniality³ group, emerging in the last decade of the 20th Century, is

¹ Initiated by theorists such as Mariategui, Retamar, Octavio Paz, Martínez Estrada and Andrade, among others.

² "Modernidad/Colonialidad" group formed of John Beverley, Javier Sanjinés, Patricia Seed, Walter Mignolo, Ileana Rodríguez, Alberto Moreiras, Michael Clark, José Rabasa and María Milagros López, who made their theoretical program known in a document entitled: *Founding Statement, Boundary*. (No 2. Vol. 20, No. 3, The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America (Autumn, 1993), pp. 110-121)

³ A multidisciplinary and multigenerational group of intellectuals including, among others, the sociologists Aníbal Quijano, Edgardo Lander, Ramón Grosfoguel y Agustín Lao-Montes, semiologists Walter Mignolo y Zulma Palermo, educator Catherine Walsh, anthropologists Arturo Escobar y Fernando Coronil, literary critic Javier Sanjinés and philosophers Enrique Dussel, Santiago Castro-Gómez, María Lugones and Nelson Maldonado-Torres.

considered the most genuine Latin American answer to postcolonialism, being one of the most significant collectives of critical thought currently active in Latin America. The initial focus of their theories is based on the concept of the 'coloniality of power', developed by the Peruvian sociologist, Aníbal Quijano (1992) that incorporates not only the economic, political and military dimensions of colonialism, but also its epistemological ones. This new tendency is constructed upon questioning the foundations that govern hegemonic western knowledge. From these discussions emerged the 'Decolonial Option', well represented, for example, by Argentine semiotologist Walter D. Mignolo (2008), who brings together the new Latin American critical currents in order to examine their implications in all spheres of life, including aesthetics.

The aesthetic theories of the 20th and 21st Centuries appear to be characterized by their dialogue with politics and the dominant critical thought. While the West discusses the surmounting of postmodernity and the birth of a 'Altermodern' new aesthetic, the decolonial critique reaffirms the existence of an aesthetic of its own, named 'Decolonial Aesthetics'. This new artistic expressions would be the answer of the different countries that today suffer the legacy of a colonial past. The 'Decolonial Option' challenges the dominant Euro-American discourses in order to signal the imposition of its procedures. The development of this option, coming from the Latin American school, has been debated in academic fields as distinct as anthropology, semiology and sociology, culminating in the recognition of a new aesthetic, characterized as exploring the confusion created by historical colonialism and its continuities, as well as reflecting the multiple forms of imposition and exclusion inflicted by the colonisers. The intention of this essay is to analyse the most significant concepts of the 'Decolonial Option' put forward by Mignolo, as well as its

application in the arena of aesthetics, also to appreciate the relevance of the emergent 'Decolonial Aesthetics'. I will contrast it with the most recent theory that has emerged from Europe, that of 'Altermodernity', formulated by French critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud (2009). Lastly, there will be a brief description of some recent artworks, with the aim of questioning the potential of the new aesthetic proposal, not only as a tool to achieve the construction of decolonial subjectivities, but also in its capacity for integration with the pertinent logic in the spheres of the dominant artistic aesthetics.

My analysis of decolonial aesthetics, is primarily justified by my interest in the study of the critical thought of those which are perceived culturally as 'Others' and whose form of inhabiting the world is based on paradigms traditionally unexplored by the nerve centres of European academia. Secondly, I base my work on the very new consideration that peripheral artistic production might be endorsed by a common theoretical discourse, and therefore I might be able to offer an alternative to dominant aesthetic theories. I would like to point out, likewise, that the work is oriented towards the evolution of the new decolonial aesthetics, not of non-Western artistic production, very well known and valued within the more specialized spheres.

II. - Background

This section lays out the different strategies developed from the periphery in order to make its voice heard, brought about by the new Western disposition to assimilate novel aesthetic ideas. It also examines the birth of Latin American theoretical discourse, the driving force behind these aesthetics.

Until recent decades, non-Western contemporary art, referred to as 'peripheral art' was destined for ethnographic and historical museums, as if the contemporary and postmodern project limited all that that was foreign to a restricted and exclusive field. In its eagerness to classify, the labels of 'primitivism' and 'naivety' placed by the West on aesthetics that were foreign to the modernizing progress, seemed to condemn the countries considered Third World to be forgotten, underestimating their cultural creation and their creators, with the exception of very few names⁴, generally formed of the European canons, who returned to their countries of origin to develop their work. Therefore, the grand archetypes of modern art appeared to exclude the representation of societies that, according to the continental canons, located in the caboose of the train of modernity. They were busy reconstructing their identity, an identity negated and ignored by the continued colonial impositions, since despite the status of independence that had been achieved by the ex-colonies, the hegemonic practices seemed to continue.

From the point of view of the aesthetic parameters of the West, the 'ethnic' was not worthy of being counted within the discourse of the contemporary. However, the animosity shown towards the foreign and exotic, by these new ideas, seems to have changed. The market of international aesthetics is no longer restrictive, and has become receptive to the artistic ideas furthest from its canons. In very little time, the mainstream has widened its limited territory and opened out to the distant and diverse. That which Said (1978) called the 'Other' now arouses the interest of the art museums, galleries, art fairs and biennials of contemporary art. What has happened? What has provoked this change of opinion in favour of the periphery?

⁴ Artists such as: Roberto Matta, Rufino Tamayo, Diego Rivera, Mario Carreño, Frida Kahlo, Alfredo Ramos Martinez and Lucio Fontana, among others.

The appearance of the aesthetics of the margins in the new artistic order has coincided with the so called 'postcolonial period', where different theoretical schools debate the form in which they articulate their national identity with the legacy of Western colonization. However, for the scholars of subalterity, the incorporation of the periphery into contemporary global culture is still far from being a true regain of their identities. Bhabha (1984) sets out, in his concept of 'mimicry', the idea that colonization imposed a foreign mask on the subaltern in order to permit them to negotiate their resistance, not allowing them to express themselves openly. In turn, in Latin America, the metaphor of 'anthropophagy' (Mosquera 2011), created in 1928 by writer Oswald de Andrade, has been widely debated by the critics. The strategy⁵ consists of voluntarily ingesting the dominant culture and assuming the discourse of Western modernity, in order to obtain the approval to construct ones own discourse. In other words, through the appropriation of the dominant culture, a strategy of resistance and an affirmation of the subaltern subject would be initiated, from which new theories could emerge.

For some, modernity is a fundamentally aesthetic project. This was defined by Heidegger (1938) as the construction of the "image of the world", whose creation he attributes to science as much as to art:

One of the essential phenomena of the modern age is its science...

A phenomenon of the modern period lies in the event of arts moving into the purview of aesthetics. That means that the artwork becomes the object of mere subjective experience and, that

⁵ Oswald de Andrade, O. 1928. "Manifiesto antropófago", in *Revista de Antropofagia*, San Paulo. Year 1, N. 1, May 1928.

consequently art is considered to be an expression of human life (Heidegger 1938).

However, the art that Heidegger refers to is not the expression of everyone, but of those who are able to express in their work the same essence of modernity conveyed by Weber or Matisse. Today the artists and thinkers of the 'subaltern' countries that inherited the other face of modernity, rewrite their own discourse, elaborating its own distinct epistemology and confronting the modernity dictated by the West. Such is the case with *Latin American Modernity*, where varied movements have formed to construct its essence, developing distinct forms of liberation. From the 'Critical pedagogy' of Paulo Freire, through to the 'Ethics of liberation' of Enrique Dussel, and the idea of 'Our own' of José Martí, Aime Cesaire, Franz Fanon or Manuel Zapata, among others. However, the theory of 'Coloniality of power' originally formulated by Anibal Quijano (1992) and widened later by the group of intellectuals known as Modernity/Coloniality⁶, is one of the most highly debated epistemological ideas on the contemporary Latin American intellectual stage. In its celebrated article *Coloniality and Modernity-rationality* (1992), Quijano maintains that the manipulation of modernity was based on the control of knowledge as well as on the regulation of the logic of coloniality, and that liberation consisted of the epistemic decolonization of being and knowledge. Quijano asserts (1992:14):

The alternative, then, is clear: the destruction of the coloniality of world power. First of all, epistemological decolonization, as

⁶ Formed of theorists Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo, Edgardo Lander, Santiago Castro-Gómez, Catherine Walsh, Ramón Grosfoguel, Arturo Escobar and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, among others.

decoloniality, is needed to clear the way for new intercultural communication, for an interchange of experiences and meanings, as the basis of another rationality which may legitimately pretend to some universality.

From its beginnings, the decolonial idea looks for a way of incorporating subaltern knowledge into the dominant processes of production, given that the cultural studies initiated in postmodernity were developed on the foundations established by the coloniality of power. The Eurocentric idea of the 'point zero' complies with the strategy of economic, political and cognitive control over the world (Castro-Gómez, 2007). While for the West, the processes of change put in motion by global capitalism drive the formation of a new order, decolonial thought is presented as the counterpart of a hegemonic and overbearing modernity, creator of differences (racism, poverty, epidemics), ignored by the colonial matrix of power. Walter Mignolo (2007:26) defines it as:

The basic argument (almost a syllogism) that I will develop here is the following: if coloniality is constitutive of modernity since the salvationist rhetoric of modernity presuppose the oppressive and condemnatory logic of coloniality...this oppressive logic produces an energy of discontent, of distrust, of release between those who react against imperial violence.

This energy translates to decolonial projects that, according to the author, are also constituents of modernity. Decoloniality is the thought that detaches itself from

the modern rationality that generates humiliated, forgotten and marginalized human beings who now reclaim their place in the global world. In summary, it is the energy not allowed to operate, by the rhetoric of salvation and the progress of coloniality. The modernity/coloniality project, born and developed in the midst of the group of Latino researchers, introduces the category of 'decoloniality', used in the sense of the 'decolonial turn'. This thinking is part of the supposition that the transition from modern colonialism to global coloniality has not transformed the structure of the centre-periphery relations on a global scale. As Maldonado Torres (2006) explains, colonialism shouldn't be confused with coloniality. While colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a people resides in the power of another people or nation, coloniality, in contrast, makes reference to the master or matrix of power that is the result of modern colonialism. The colonial matrix of power refers to the different forms of articulation of work, knowledge, authority and intersubjective relations determined "by the global capitalist market and the criteria of race" (Maldonado Torres 2006: 131).

There exists, therefore, a modern colonialism characterized by the coloniality of being and knowledge, not just in the social sciences, but also in other modern institutions like the museum, university, art, politics and thought. This idea has been central to the emergence of new critical perspectives, not only in the traditional academic disciplines, but also in the aesthetic projection of their statements. The rupture of imposed models and the impulse to self-made identities would be the decolonial response to the homogenising tendencies of globalisation. This rupture would also be propelled through questions of aesthetics. As Pedro Pablo Gómez (2011) asserts, the coloniality of the sensitive is disseminated in particular through art and aesthetics, which form part of the expansion of coloniality, together with a range

of forms intended to span all aspects of life. Gómez maintains that aesthetics and contemporary art are constituents of the problem of Eurocentrism, in the sense that they form part of a system/world whose logic is determined by capitalism and scientific and technological rationality. Art and modern aesthetics express the modernity/coloniality matrix in their modes of representation, in their discursive frameworks, in institutions and in their modes of distinction and production of subjects and relations.

In summary, the decolonial thought initiated in Latin America becomes especially interesting in its relationship with the aesthetic, as an important element used for the objectives of colonialism. Therefore, can we confirm that there is a reaction to the dominant metalanguage that must be transgressed in order to relaunch ones own? How does the decolonial option express itself in terms of aesthetics? How do we include the decolonial vision in global colonisation? In the following section we will try to highlight the most important concepts of the decolonial option, in order to be able to analyse their significance for the field of aesthetics.

III. - Locating positions

The primordial object of colonial theories is to open a space from which the postcolonial individual can acquire their own identity as subject. The central guidelines of postcolonial theory were initially defined by the Palestinian theorist Edward Said (1978), who initiated a genealogy of the European knowledge of the 'Other', showing the links between literature (the human sciences) and imperialism. This path was followed rapidly by Indian academics like Hommi Bhabha, Ranahid Guha and Gayatri Spivak, who developed theories that conceptualized postcolonial relations using terms such as 'hybridity', 'subalternity' and also including feminist

statements. As Castro-Gómez (1999) asserts, the postcolonial critique of Said, Guha, Bhabha and Spivak put into relief the persistence of the colonial legacies spread by modernity. These theories presented an opportunity for the West to rethink its history, accepting the critiques that coloniality has been utilised politically and culturally by the dominant nations. In the vein of these critiques, the Latin American thought begins to make itself heard with its own personality. The common argument is for the social plurality of the South, having been homogenised in favour of the dominant imperialist interests, “operating with a series of literary, philosophical and sociological representations that structurally hide their differences” (Castro-Gómez 1999:84). The emergence of the Modernity/Coloniality group looks to delegitimize the colonial project of modernity, and the Eurocentric concept that only the countries of the first world are able to produce knowledge. For Castro-Gómez, the way of making and thinking the ‘decolonial’ is a response to the oppressive and imperialist inclinations of the European beginnings of modernity, projected and applied in the non-European world.

Walter Mignolo sums up the theories of the new perspective for and from Latin America, in what they call the ‘Decolonial option’. As Francisco Carballo (2010) has described, Mignolo’s theory is based on two foundations. On the one hand, a frontal critique of modernity born in the Renaissance, a phenomenon belonging to European culture and united with a colonial logic, that universalizes its own reality, excluding all alterity. On the other, his theory is based around the idea that Latin America is an invention linked to colonialism, external and internal, an idea that converts modernity into something distant, since colonial difference implies that the colonized occupy the dark face of dominant culture. It is fitting to point out that colonization in Latin America began under different circumstances than that in the areas of the world that

form part of the British Empire. It is for this reason that Anglo-Saxon postcolonial theory doesn't seem sufficient to make visible the specificity of the Latin American debate around coloniality. As Mignolo (2003) asserts, the Indian model of postcolonial theorization should not be used for analysis of colonial situations in Latin America, since it corresponds to a very specific 'locus', anchored in the British colonial legacy. In order to be achieved, Decolonial thought proposes an epistemological turn coming from the exteriority of the networks of power. This turn is defined by Mignolo (2003:55) as:

The paradigmatic transition towards a critique of Eurocentrism that is not Eurocentric, but that decentres Eurocentrism and dissolves it in the planetary totality. An 'other paradigm' presented and constructed here for the sake of conscience of coloniality. An 'other paradigm' similar to the paradigmatic transition in that which we can call 'the place of encounter', arriving at it from distinct directions.

In contrast to some theorists of modernity with great influence in Latin America, like Jürgen Habermas (1989) or Marshall Berman (1982), that see modernity as an emancipatory and as yet unachieved project, Mignolo points out a hidden dimension to the story. For Mignolo (2009:39), modernity is a European narrative that has a hidden face: coloniality. The rhetoric of modernity (novelty, progress, development) hides another reality taking place at the same time. Faced with a polycentric and non-capitalist world where empires, caliphates and dynasties co-exist, the advent of modernity came to unify the economic system as well as the equilibrium of powers. The hegemonic role assumed by Europe with regard to the

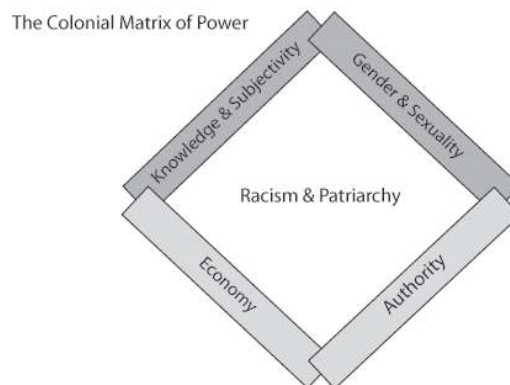
rest of the world achieved more in the two fields of economy and epistemology, than any others. Regarding the economy, the new European society had as its economic base an increase in production in order to reinvest the profits, which, combined with the scientific revolution, produced a power that no other culture had ever achieved in the past. The modern revolution was propelled by the beginning of free trade, and, as Mignolo (2009) points out, the trade in slaves was also a key factor in the increase of riches. Lives became expendable, a notion justified through the racial classification of human beings. The second transformation, regarding epistemology, is usually associated with the European Renaissance. Here the term epistemology is extended in order to cover the sciences and knowledge as well as art/meaning. In other words, modernity was constructed on the basis of domination and imposition of hegemonic paradigms. Mignolo asserts (2009:41):

There is, however, a hidden dimension of events that were taking place at the same time, both in the sphere of the economy and in the sphere of knowledge: the expendability of human life (e.g., enslaved Africans) and of life in general from the Industrial Revolution into the twenty-first century.

Decolonial thought parts from the supposition that the hierarchy of powers formed during centuries of European colonial expansion, was not transformed significantly for the purpose of colonialism. Rather, it has cleared the way for a transition from modern colonialism to a global coloniality, a process that has transformed the forms of domination spread by modernity, but not the structure of relations, to a global scale (Castro-Gómez/Grosfoguel 2007). Mignolo (2009:39)

indicates that 'global modernities' imply 'global colonialities': If modernity can't exist without coloniality, global modernities cannot exist without global colonialities. So what exactly does this colonial matrix of power consist of?

For Mignolo (2008:10) the rhetoric of modernity promises distinct forms of economic salvation, moral regulations and state orders. However that same project of modernity, in order to advance, requires that coloniality be put into practice, which transforms differences in order to assimilate or eliminate them. The author points to 16th Century Europe as the initiator of a network of powers through which the image of 'modernity' was hidden. The colonial matrix of power of modernity is based on distinct dominiums: the control of the economy, that of authority, as well as the control of sexuality, knowledge and subjectivity.



Now, therefore, in the four spheres of the colonial matrix, the dark side of the rhetoric of modernity is that which is said and done in each one of these areas in the name of progress, that legitimates war (symbolic and material) upon those obstacles that stand in the way of salvation and progress. In the centre of the square are the two poles and pillars that support the statements.

In effect, what are the agencies (institutions and people) that legitimize, by means of knowledge, the rhetoric of modernity as well as the logic of coloniality that is exerted through the matrix of power? The control of knowledge in the European Renaissance was in the hands of men - white Christians (Catholics in the south, Protestants in the north) - conservative in matters of gender and sexuality. Therefore the rhetoric of modernity and progress, as well as the logic of coloniality and control, was supported in a cognitive system that was patriarchal (regulating gender and sexual relations), and racist (defending Christianity over other religions, and 'purity of blood' as much in religious matters as biological ones). Mignolo concludes that the different dominiums of power are moved from their origins by the dominant rules and that these models still continue to be in force, because they have not been questioned sufficiently. Mignolo asserts (2010):

The struggle that continues in the 21st Century is for the control of knowledge. If we only enter into the dominiums to analyse their meaning, not to question the rules that exert control over them, we will always lose.

For Mignolo, the "machine for generating differences" was put in motion with the beginning of hierarchies in human groups, Indians on the one hand and Africans on the other. Both are colonized, but rather than being considered civilisations, they were labelled "barbaric and primitive". The objective of the matrix of power has been to classify, control and dominate the population. Europe constructed differences in relation to other countries and other cultures, models that, Mignolo maintains (2010), continue to be repeated today. The attitude of the West not only acted to control

populations, but also produced subjectivities that accepted its impositions. In the name of liberty and democracy, the values of non-Western alternatives became diluted and devalued. Therefore, as Mignolo describes, the decolonial option presupposes an initial loosening of the rhetoric of modernity in which models of thought are legitimated and converted into equivalents of the “same organization of societies and their historic events” (Mignolo 2008:15). In the same way, the significance of the decolonial option, decolonial thought and decoloniality only make sense in confrontation with the detachment of the colonial matrix of power.

So if the goal is emancipation and the impositions of colonial power are inevitable, how do we think from the position of subalternity? How is it possible to devise decolonial thought? Decoloniality introduces ideas that are differentiated by postmodernity, put forward by the post-structuralist thought of Foucault, Lacan and Derrida, as much as the canon of postcoloniality represented by Said, Spivak and Bhaba. From Latin America, Quijano (1992) links the coloniality of power with the ‘coloniality of knowledge’ and argues that if knowledge was an imperial instrument of colonization, there is an urgent need to proceed towards its decolonization. Therefore, Mignolo (2010a) centres part of his reflection around knowledge and epistemology, understood as modalities of colonization. Faced with coloniality of knowledge, Mignolo encourages ‘epistemic disobedience’, that is to say, a dismantling of the formulations constituted from the centre and adopted as ‘unalterable’ from the periphery. Epistemic disobedience initiates a process of detachment from the Eurocentric roots of knowledge, constituted from Western universalisms. The decolonial option guides the epistemic turn towards ‘an other

universality' that is nourished by its own sources⁷, and is advocated by a global project that accepts a plurality of options. Confronted with the imposed models, the decolonial option advocates a phase of de-Westernisation, proposing non-Western, autonomous processes of modernity and modernization. In summary, the decolonial turn drives a non-European perspective that overcomes the centrality of Euro-American modernity, which presupposes a 'modernity of reference' and puts other countries in subordinate positions.

In summary, Mignolo presents a new paradigm formulated from Latin America for understanding the realities of a planetary 'coloniality power'. The decolonial option offers an alternative to the modern model that emerged from Europe - a system of power developed over centuries that extends to the present day. Confronted with this matrix of power, Mignolo (2010) proposes a series of tools (epistemic disobedience, de-Westernising processes etc.) in order to confront the global impositions that span various fields. In the following chapter, I will locate the use of these resources in a more concrete field, that of aesthetics.

IV. - Towards 'an other feeling'. Decolonising Aesthetics

Contemporary artistic practices are accomplished through the praxis of a critical thought requiring historical, sociological and cultural tools in the widest sense. The decolonial option reveals the colonial differences in this plan. Its processes of resistance take place through different practices, stemming as much from politics, ethics and art theory as in response to coloniality (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel 2007). As opposed to coloniality, represented by a structure that organizes and

⁷ Mignolo refers here to at policies of Amilcar Cabral, Aime Cesaire, Rigoberta Menchu o Gloria Anzaldua, among others

drives populations and their resources, decoloniality refers to the processes through which those who do not accept their own domination, work to construct alternative networks not driven by the matrix of power. The cultures of art form part of the colonial matrix of power, in the processes of the manipulation of subjectivities, since the singularity of art was marked by the European conception of aesthetics, which was expanded to the colonies and ex-colonies, and whose ultimate plan was to civilise the population. According to decolonial thought, the coloniality of power is connected by specific controls such as the coloniality of knowledge, the coloniality of being and of thinking. In its response to what has been imposed, the decolonial discourse considers that modernity needs to be understood as a cognitive colonization (modes of thought) and a colonization of the senses (mode of feeling). Its option therefore is situated in a position of resistance: 'an other thinking' (epistemic decoloniality) and 'an other feeling' (aesthetic decoloniality). Aesthetic coloniality is based on the universal definition of art, established as a point of reference in order to classify and disqualify all that does not comply with its ideas. In opposition, decolonial aesthetics looks to decolonize the concepts complicit in art and aesthetics in order to liberate the inherent subjectivities of each culture.

Mignolo (2010b) theorises decolonial aesthetics by asserting that the canons of perception also had their 'point of origination' in Europe and it is from there that they were disseminated to the rest of the world. In his semiological interpretation, the author points out that the word 'aesthesia' originates in ancient Greece and was accepted, without modifying its significance, by the modern European languages. This meaning revolved around vocabularies like 'sensation', 'process of perception', 'visual and auditory sensibility and taste', which move or provoke pleasure. It was in the 18th Century when 'aesthesia' was appropriated by imperial thought and

transformed into 'aesthetics'. From that point forward the concept was restricted and would come to signify "sense of the beautiful and sublime". Mignolo asserts that it was in this way that aesthetics was born as theory, and the concept of art, as practice. In the course of the last three centuries, the sublime became the second term and the beautiful became the sole preoccupation of aesthetics, limiting the Western concept of art. As Mignolo points out (2010b: 14):

The mutation of the aiesthesis in aesthetics laid the foundations for the construction of its own history, and for the devaluation of all aesthetic experience that had not been conceptualized in the terms that Europe conceptualized its own and regional sensorial experience.

In this way, the author establishes the existence of aesthetic canons created in the West, dictated within a historic and cultural context that had little or nothing to do with the periphery. The concept of 'aiesthesis', Mignolo asserts, assumes the creation of a system of canons for one community in particular, that is, the dominant bourgeois class, united to the configuration of a European modernity and in that sense, not 'universalizable'. On the other hand, he highlights the existence of important cognitive differences between the centre and the periphery, since the West privileged the perception of the senses, basing its social structures and systems of control on visual perception. However, in the case of Latin America, as with other colonized countries, there exist distinct cultural essences that, despite having been repressed, are still present today. For populations⁸ like the Quechua or the Aymara⁸

⁸ Native people in Latin America

that do not use the eye as point of reference, it is difficult to understand this type of relation of 'surveillance and control', defined by Foucault (1995) and adopted by the structures of power in modern societies, primarily through the sense of sight. As an alternative to visual perception, in Latin America, other imaginaries of spiritual origin are substituted. For example, the religious heritage of Pachamama (Mother Earth) represents the native idea of constant exchange of goods with the earth. The land was not an authoritarian, vigilant and punitive divinity, but a protector and provider of gifts that shelter humans, facilitating their evolution. In exchange for this help and protection, the being that inhabits her is obliged to offer part of what they receive, configuring a system of luck and reciprocation.

According to the European reading of the invention of 'America', the history and cosmology of cultures such as the Inca, Aztec and Aymara, are subordinated in a way that has meant that these cultures lose, in a more or less gradual form, their explicative function to the subjects that have been part of them. The aesthetic discourse of the decolonial option hopes to rediscover the materiality of such cultural manifestations, in both aspects, *mestizo* societies and indigenous ones, not with the end of exporting the exotic or the primitive, but in order to understand specific forms of producing knowledge, including their own conceptions of the world. So, does 'an feeling other' put forward decoloniality from the arena of aesthetics?

As a first step, Mignolo (2010) points out the necessity to decolonize the universality of the concept of the 'aesthetic' and return to 'aesthesia', that is to say the production that creates and motivates subjectivities, without limiting aesthetics to only the beautiful or the sublime. Secondly, the author asserts that instead of talking about one, singular notion of aesthetics we should talk about aesthetics in a plural sense, because rather than being unique or absolute, they proceed from different

histories. What these approaches do have in common however is that they respond to the universal, imperial sense of 'aesthetics'. Therefore, decolonial aesthetics would have a different configuration according to the country - Africa, Asia, Central Asia or Eastern Europe. There would, however, be a connectivity, not at the level of contents or forms, but in that they would have in common what Mignolo calls (2007a) the 'colonial wound'. He describes this as a wound brought about by racist colonial difference, in the sense that it downgraded all the human beings excluded from the parameters established by the West. Authors such as Hegel, considered revolutionary in European philosophy, unfortunately didn't find space for all the continents when developing his theories on totality of humanity and its story. Hegel claims (1956:93):

The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it, we must quite give up the principle that naturally accompanies all our ideas. The Negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality - all that we call feeling - if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character.

Aesthetics is a modern and colonial discipline whose summit is crowned by Kant (2003:110):

The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example

in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality. So fundamental is the difference between these two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in colour.

Mignolo (2007) maintains that this wound is still open, since racial discrimination implanted its canons in modernity, imposing a sense of inferiority on humans not contained within the “model predetermined by Euro-American accounts”. Against these distinctions, the decolonial option puts forward a rift in the parameters of knowledge and feeling exported by the colonial neurological centres, in order to excavate the foundations of culture and identity. Creating the epistemological foundation for a decolonisation of aesthetics, according to Mignolo (2010b), would consist of disconnecting the European legacy in order to “liberate aiesthesis - to return to recuperate the expression of those feelings and sensations denied by the West, to decolonise the privilege of the eye and try to move away from the panopticon imposed by the canons of modernity. Here, Mignolo reinforces the discourse of ‘an other thinking’ that promotes epistemological disobedience as decolonial option. This option promotes the necessity of avoiding theories idolised by Europe and dictated to institutions like universities and museums, that, according to the decolonial critique, continue to act as strongholds, looking after their territory and imposing their discipline. For decolonial thought, museums and universities were and continue to be two fundamental institutions for the reproduction of the coloniality of

knowledge and being. This brings us to the question of the place occupied by museums and the rhetoric of modernity.

According to Mignolo (2006), the capitalist metaphor of the accumulation of goods is repeated in museums as well as in centres of art, shown by their eagerness to accumulate meanings in an encyclopaedic manner. At the same time, the museum institution has been linked to the logic of coloniality, or in other words, “to the necessity of converting and civilizing the inhabitants of the planet that are still outside of history, the barbaric and primitive” (Mignolo 2006:71). Western theories accept the colonial criticism that European museums were used as vehicles of the imperialist model of the epoch. In some countries, such as Britain, the enactment of educative laws obliged students to visit museums as part of their academic practices. This legislation coincided with the promotion of the concept of national identity in those states. Annie Coombes (1988) points out that the imperial identity is based on the colonial ideal. In an epoch dominated by imperialism, the West considers itself the cradle of civilization, modernization and progress. Coombes (1988: 57) maintains:

It was in this context that museums and, in particular, the ethnographic sections, attempted to negotiate a position of relative autonomy, guided by a code of professional and supposedly disinterested ethics, while at the same time proposing themselves as useful tools in the service of the colonial administration.

Coombes identifies as ‘colonial techniques’ the exhibition of cultures of ‘primitive’ peoples by the European powers, as artefacts that have been plundered. Therefore the role of ethnographic collectors and art collectors is directed towards the

affirmation of identity, disseminating a national heritage linked to collective memory and represented as superior to colonized cultures. As the author proposes, museums have carried out a definitive role in the formation of modern colonial subjectivities. Coombes (1988) asserts that the states based their ideology on imperialism, consolidating their national identity by showing the colonised cultures and art as less evolved. In opposition to this, decolonial ideas outline the challenge of unlearning the forms of looking of the West. Decolonial aesthetics therefore, within the field of art, would be the different ways of making visible, audible and perceivable the struggles of resistance against the established powers, and the commitment to creating modes of substitution for the hegemony in each dimension of modernity and its hidden face, colonialism. In this way, decolonialisation can be identified through visions and conceptions of the world developed by intellectuals belonging to other cultural origins, conceived from specific contexts not to do with the European cosmovision. For Mignolo (2010), understanding the visions of the world laid out by decolonial aesthetics makes possible new readings of the processes of cultural development in the periphery, incorporating those visions in a view of the future for traditionally colonized peoples.

Once I have analysed decolonial theory in its aesthetic sense, I will contrast it with the most recent proposal emerging from Eurocentrism, Altermodernism, since only through this comparison can we appreciate the relevance of the decolonial aesthetic option.

V. - Decoloniality versus Altermodernity?

Art and European modernity have recently been represented in various exhibitions of special significance. In 2009, the Museum of Modern Art of Barcelona (MACBA)

inaugurated the show *Modernologies*⁹, curated by Sabine Breitwieser. Some months before, the Triennial of the Tate Britain in London had taken place, curated by Nicolas Bourriaud, entitled *Altermodernity*¹⁰. The following year, in 2010, by way of reply from Latin America, the exhibition *Estéticas Descoloniales*¹¹, curated by Colombians Pedro Pablo Gómez and María Elvira Ardila and the Argentine theorist Walter D. Mignolo. The exhibition was shown simultaneously in the Exhibition Space of the Academia Superior de Artes de Bogotá (ASAB), the Museum of Modern Art of Bogotá (MAMBO) and the project space of 'El Parqueadero del Banco de la República'. The curatorial intentions of the event as well as the parallel debates were inserted within the exhibition's discursive strategies, in line with European shows. The exhibition raised a heated theoretical debate with position taking between the decolonial and altermodern project that went beyond art, opening out to a wider sense of the aesthetic as a form of life.

As Mignolo (2010c) describes, there are two types of critique that confront the project of modernity: one generated from Europe, consisting of Postmodernity and Altermodernity; and another that has its origin outside the Western world, consisting of postcolonialism, represented by the Indian intellectuals and decoloniality, the option put forward not only by Latin America but by the countries of the Third World in general. As can be deduced from the shows cited above, each of these critical positions suggests a particular aesthetic approach. Although each of them would be deserving of an extensive essay, we will centre our debate around the confrontations and parallels of the two options, Altermodernity and Decoloniality, since they exist in

⁹ <http://arte-nuevo.blogspot.com/2009/09/modernologias-en-el-macba.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/altermodern/>

¹¹ <http://www.banrepcultural.org/el-parqueadero/esteticas-descoloniales.html>

conflict with each other. Continuing the outline of our reasoning, we will do a brief analysis of Altermodern discourse, proposed from the West by French critic Nicolas Bourriaud. The theories mentioned are deployed in his works *Relational Aesthetics* (2002) *Postproduccion* (2005), and *Radicant* (2010a), where he describes the juncture of contemporary practices. The author proposes new terms such as 'relational', 'postproduction', 'semionaut' and 'radicant', among others, serving to highlight that new realities require new languages. Bourriaud introduces the concept of the 'altermodern' around a premise: that postmodernism has reached its end. According to his *Manifiesto* (2009), globalisation and geographical mobility are establishing a new type of representation:

A new modernity is emerging, reconfigured to an age of globalization, understood in its economic, political and cultural aspects: an altermodern culture. Increased communication, travel and migration are affecting the way we live. Our daily lives consist of journeys in a chaotic and teeming universe. Multiculturalism and identity is being overtaken by creolisation: Artists are now starting from a globalised state of culture.

Altermodern is a new term that proposes to describe how contemporary artists respond to the globalized world in which we live, and explore the transcultural landscape that surrounds us, as well as the multiple forms of expression and communication from which they are derived. Bourriaud incorporates concepts in his theories that come from the debate of the European school, such as the 'universalism' of Alain Badiou (2003), which claims that the human being is not linked

to territory, but rather, to the universality of the citizen that has different communities as its reference. Bourriaud defends the concept of the 'altermodern' as an overcoming of two opposite and conflicting cosmovisions that according to him are antiquated: modernism and postmodernism. Altermodernity looks for a reconstruction of the modern in the present. In other words, altermodernity would be a new modernity reconfigured by the era of economic political and cultural globalization. Here he appears to take up the concept of 'cosmopolitanism' as defined by Ulrich Beck (2006). 'Cosmopolitanism' proposes a deal with alterity in which it is recognized that the other can't be delimited with regard to the observer, but is a constituent part of its own experience. Bourriaud (2010a) highlights as vital the reflection around multiculturalism and globalization. The altermodern option would be, in this case, the response of the artists to these new paradigms. In their vision of a new global aesthetic, multiculturalism and the discourse of postmodern identities would be overtaken by a "planetary movement" that the author calls 'creolization'¹², since according to him, a true dialogue had not been established until that moment. Bourriaud affirms (2010a: 25):

The numerous aesthetic theories born of the nebulous alliance of cultural postcolonialism have failed to elaborate a critique of modernist ideology that does not lead to an absolute relativism or to a piling up of 'essentialisms.' In their most dogmatic form, these theories go so far as to obliterate any possibility of dialogue among individuals who do not share the same history or cultural identity.

¹² Term coined by Édouard Glissant to define a self-conscious mixture.

However, for the author, altermodernity emerged from the negotiations of the planet, from the conversations between agents of different cultures. In response to the abstract language of modernism or to that of the identities of postmodernism, Bourriaud (2009) proposes that altermodernism is characterised by translation:

This new universalism is based on translations, subtitling and generalised dubbing. Artists are responding to a new globalised perception. They traverse a cultural landscape saturated with signs and create new pathways between multiple formats of expression and communication.

In this manner, contemporary art becomes a polyglot, and the altermodern is presented as a modernity translator, in contrast to the modernism of the 20th Century, whose progressiveness spoke the abstract language of the colonial West. Altermodernity translates the immense diversity of cultural signs and incorporates them into the global language. The contemporary artist proceeds by selection, adding and multiplying, since they are not looking for an ideal state of self, art or society, but rather, organize signs to multiply one identity by another. For Bourriaud, in the era of globalization, whatever sign is translatable and contemporary art doesn't adhere to a temporal aspect but explores the links that weave together text, image, time and space. Therefore, altermodern art can be interpreted as a hypertext - artists translate and code information from one format to another and pass as much through geography as through history. It tries to reinitiate the world from a unique beginning presented as the foundation of a new language.

The new aesthetic now abandons individual identity in order to reinvent itself on another planetary scale, and Bourriaud asserts that this new modernism “will have resulted in a global dialogue, for the first time” (Bourriaud 2010b:12). The author defines the art of today in terms of a criteria of translatability, according to the nature of the contents that it transcodes, which it introduces in a chain of meaning. Translation appears as the categorical imperative of an ethic of recognition of the ‘Other’, much more than the mere registration of their difference. It tries to permit the rewriting of ‘official’ history in favour of plural accounts, permitting at the same time the possibility of a dialogue between these different versions of history. Bourriaud (2010a) concludes that altermodernity puts forward the invention of a common world, of the practical and theoretical realization of a space of planetary exchange. The artist is not explained by their condition, statute or origin, and therefore the question ‘from where do you speak?’ would be the blind spot of postcolonial theory applied to art, which, according to the author, conceives of the individual as assigned to their local, ethnic and cultural roots.

The reaction on the part of the critical Latin American thinkers was swift. In response to the European altermodern exhibition, another decolonial exhibition was produced, responding to the exclusivist ideas of the new aesthetic put forward by Bourriaud (2011)¹³ declared that a ‘transmodern’ world has emerged, reconfiguring the last 500. This event was followed by the *Manifesto of Decolonial Aesthetics* years of coloniality and its consequences, modernity, postmodernity and

¹³ Signed by thinkers, curators and artists: Alanna Lockward, Rolando Vásquez, Teresa María Díaz Nerio, Marina Grzanic, Michelle Eistrup, Tanja Ostojic, Dalida María Benfield, Raúl Moarquech Ferrera Balanquet, Pedro Lasch, Nelson Maldonado Torres, Ovidiu Tichindeleanu, Miguel Rojas Sotelo y Walter Mignolo

altermodernity, announcing a creative transfiguration from the non-Western world, which proclaimed its independence of thought and decolonial liberty in all spheres of life. The document continues to critique the altermodern assertion of the 'universality' of artistic practices, equivalent to their homogenization. This notion punishes the magnificent diversity of creative potential and its different traditions, appropriating differences instead of celebrating them.

The theory of decolonial aesthetics defends interculturality as opposed to multiculturalism. While interculturality promotes the recreation of identities silenced by the discourse of modernity, multiculturalism is administrated by the state, promoting its own identity politics and imposing its imaginary. Decolonial aesthetics declares itself transmodern, intercultural and inter-epistemological, always looking from the perspective of the countries of the South and Eastern Europe. The objective of this line of thought and the act of making decolonial is to continue re-inscribing, representing and dignifying the ways of life, thinking and feeling that became devalued and violently demonized by imperialist and interventionist coloniality, like the internal critiques inscribed in postmodernism and altermodernism.

In the inaugural conference in Bogotá, into Decolonial Aesthetics exhibition, Mignolo 2010 highlights the differences with which aesthetic discourse from the countries of the Third World are treated. For the author, altermodernity is "a project of the European family" that looks towards a similar world¹⁴ where modernism has expanded and where it finds its affiliates. The aesthetic projects of non-European countries reflect other preoccupations, and are attentive to "other problems". Mignolo points out that both, altermodernity and decoloniality, would be legitimate, although it

¹⁴ Artists represented in the exhibition at Tate Britain - Altermodern: 2009 - were mostly European, American or Japanese.

is necessary to see them from the point of view of the geopolitics of feeling and knowledge. The vision of the creators would not be the same from within the colonial matrix of power than from colonized countries. The author critiques the existence of a world, which still imposes a model and a language to justify the expendability of identities. According to Mignolo (2010), European postmodernity originates from the modern disdain for aesthetics, and imposes an aesthetic thought conceived through racist and exclusionary ideas.

The two stances, altermodernity and decoloniality, are antagonistic, and the dialogue between them creates an interesting dynamic for the observer, contrasting the pertinence of each one in the panorama of artistic practices. As the Colombian critic Guillermo Villamizar (2011) points out, it is evident that the shadow of postmodernism's discussions surrounding identity are also projected on the newly formed aesthetic theories. Bourriaud plays down any discussion that takes into account the subject of identity. For him, the point of negotiation in artistic practice comes through nomadism and creolisation of cultural habits, from which the artist extracts a selection of essences that contains all the tastes of the world, like a vaccine against the homogenisation of habits. Villamizar (2011) sums up the point of view elaborated from the other side of the global aesthetic dimension, confirming that in today's Europe, the word identity is related to the emergence of the phenomenon of the far right, associated with nationalist politics, which generates an attitude of paranoia with regard to any debate in which the word identity appears. However, within the spectrum of subaltern cultures, where an enormous debt exists in relation to the problem of identity, the decolonial strategy problematizes the critical relations between colonial subjects and colonialist politics in the current context, not just in the field of artistic practice, but in economic, social and political matters.

The recent shows, *Modernologias* and *Altermodernidad*, seem to respond to the European preoccupation with concluding the unfinished project of modernity - an exit door to a project from which many were excluded. As Habermas (1989:7) asserts:

It seems that, in place of abandoning the project of modernity as a lost cause, we should learn from the errors of those extravagant programmes that tried to deny modernity. Perhaps the reception of art offers an example that, at the least, signals an exit route.

Modernity is characterized according to Mignolo (2010) as the coloniality of knowledge, that imposes its frontiers, ignoring the different aesthetic configurations outside the empire, that today reclaim their specificity. Confronted with altermodern assimilation, the decolonial option proposes transgression. Decolonial aesthetics, according to Mignolo (2010), are an alternative to the political global society. They come as a response to global parameters, a process of liberation from consumption, from the marketization of art and from the museum as an institution to entrench Western civilization – the elitist idea of nation. Against the altermodern concept, which constructs a tolerant multiculturalisms with the difference, the decolonial discourse demands an inversion of the structure of colonial subordination. But, as García Canclini (2010:15) asserts:

Artists, who struggled so much from the 19th Century for their autonomy almost never got on well with frontiers, But what was understood by frontiers has changed. From Marcel Duchamp until the end of the last century a constant of artistic practice has been

resistance. The ways of practicing it in some ways contributed to the reinforcement of differences.

For García Canclini (2010), contemporary history of art is a paradoxical combination of behaviours dedicated to consolidating the independence of a distinct field, and others determined to bring down the limits that separate them. We can situate the two aesthetics that are the object of our analysis in these positions. While decolonial aesthetics reclaim the right of the excluded countries to the recognition of their codes and the references of their own culture, the altermodern option proclaims the triumph of a new aesthetic of assimilation, stimulated by a globalized world. When examining our initial question of decoloniality versus altermodernity, more than looking for a definitive answer, it is necessary to add a new consideration: are aesthetics exclusive or are they supplementary? The most interesting point of the debate probably resides in the capacity to problematize the relation between centre and periphery. Decolonial transmodernity has disconnected itself from all the conversations and beliefs of universalism, historical and current, which claims a unique truth. The point is not to try to incorporate oneself into the aesthetic market like another product of colonialism, discovering exotic worlds, but to attempt to effectively reclaim the recognition of pluriversality, the creation of new worlds from those aspects of culture disallowed from knowledge and from identity - in summary, to complete the incomplete project of modernism.

VI. - Decolonial Visions: Beginning

In the effort to define the most significant concepts put forward by the new proposal of decolonial aesthetics and their location in reference to the latest European

Aesthetic theories, I would like to analyze the significance and specific contribution of some artistic interventions. Through this I aim to continue to observe the logic of the decolonial optic, the object of our discussion. I will begin with work of the African American author Fred Wilson, that is considered a precursor to the decolonial strategies. To continue, in order to centre the analysis on a concrete reality, I will take the examples of three Columbian artists - Doris Salcedo, Nadine Ospina and Helena Martin Franco - given that I consider the history of Columbia to have been marked by ethnic and territorial conflicts as well as for the violence of the attempt to establish exclusive regimes of coalition. These facts, among others, make Columbia a favourable stage for the emergence of resistances.

As we have already argued, the museums of the modern world played a particular role in the colonization of knowledge, that is to say, in the imposition of forms of living, economic principles and models of subjectivities. One of the interventions considered among the best with regard to contemporary art's contribution to the reflection on the representation of history by the museum, belongs to African American artist Fred Wilson - namely his popular and influential installation *Mining the Museums* (1992-93), presented in Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore (MHS). Wilson worked in the 1970s as an educator in various institutions¹⁵. As the American curator, Judith Stein (1993) points out, on the basis of this privileged information the artist created a series whose intention was to 'mock the museum'. A political activist and installation artist, Wilson takes social justice as his theme and museology as his medium. Following the museum's style of categorisation, lighting,

¹⁵ In the 1970s, he supported himself as a free-lance museum educator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the American Museum of Natural History and the American Crafts Museum.

as well as wall and cabinet colour, Wilson deals with the question of how museums consciously or unconsciously reinforce racist beliefs and behaviours.

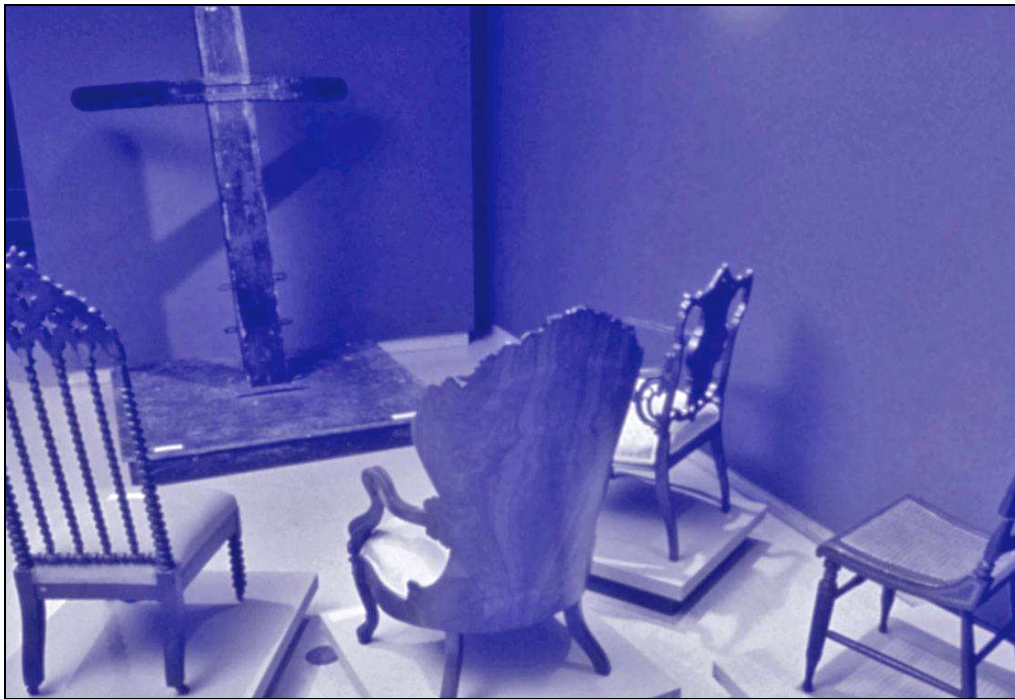


Metal Work, 1793-1880, Fred Wilson, from *Mining the Museum*. Silver service and handcuffs to restrain slaves.

Stein (1993) underlines the transcendence of this work, since it was presented during the annual conference of the *American Association of Museums*, meeting in Baltimore in April 1992. *Mining the Museum* was seen by thousands of museum professionals in its first weeks. At a local as well as a national level, the exhibition provoked a spectacle of overwhelming interest, and it increased its duration to 11 months, becoming the most visited exhibition in the 150 years of the MHS's history. The installation surprised its visitors as much for its critique as for its context: the long established racist stereotype of a historical society.

The year 1992 was a polemic moment of celebrations and challenges since it marked 500 years from the 'discovery' of America, coinciding with the beginnings of the trade in African slaves.

While Europe accumulated riches through the extraction of gold and silver in the mines of the Caribbean, it also accumulated knowledge for its museums. For the decolonial option, the institution of the museum has been considered fundamental in the colonisation of knowledge and being. The restructuring of its contents could be initiated through a new reading of the significance of its collections. This was the



Cabinet Making 1820-1960. Fred Wilson, from *Mining the Museum*.
The Contemporary Museum and Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, 1992-93.

intention of Wilson with his intervention into the collections of the museum in Baltimore. In one of the most significant works of the show *Cabinet Making 1829 - 1960* (1992), Wilson displays a series of antique chairs facing the same direction. Whoever made use of them had their gaze directed towards a point, as if the chairs

were being used for a musical concert or a performance of song, so common within the parties of families of the elite. Evidently, the chairs belonged to the well-to-do colonial class. However, the object of the gazes, on a stage and under a spotlight, is a 'sculpture' of special significance, a powerful symbol of the horrors of slavery: a post on which slaves were tied to be whipped. The victims of the cross would have been black, and the spectators, who accepted slavery as the norm, were white. The display of the punishment as a public spectacle and the privileged position of the observer create an uncomfortable sensation of complicity, which was without doubt encouraged by Wilson, in order to awaken consciences.

What does Wilson's 'making decolonial' consist of? Firstly, his questioning of art and institutions, this unexpected juxtaposition of objects reveals the manner in which they functioned as bearers of socio-cultural significance. And their relocation, as well as the form in which they are presented, can create, subvert and magnify their meaning. In a process of exploration the artist discovered many objects accumulated in the store of the museum, which are not shown to the public in its galleries. Paradoxically, we can understand it to be frequent practice that, despite an enthusiasm for collecting, there exists in the museum a tendency to hide pieces from the public, in spite of their enormous significance. The subversion here consists in re-inserting these 'forgotten' objects in the collections, providing them with new significance. Secondly, *Cabinet Making* outlines an act of epistemic disobedience, since it uses installation in order to reveal what has been hidden in the colonial history of slavery, and the consequences of racism. Wilson inverts the educative role of the museum and turns it into a critic of its own history.

A clear questioning exists, therefore, of the prevailing hierarchical model in ethnographic European and North American collections, driven towards establishing

differences. As Mignolo (2010b: 18) asserts:

Oppression and negation are two aspects of the logic of coloniality. The first operates in the action of an individual over another, in unequal relations of power. The second is made upon individuals, in the way in which they negate that which, instinctively, they know. The decolonial processes consist of taking both from the repressed places, and showing the imperial characteristics of 'negation'.

The work of Wilson demonstrates that a decolonizing vision can come from the same museum, oriented towards another interpretation of history, even though it has been systematically ignored.

Focussing now on the contemporary Colombian art scene, we can highlight the fact that the new forms of decolonial thought have put into effect new modes of approximation of identities and the resurgence of cultural traditions, which today generate new sensibilities and definitions in artistic production. The grand mutations that Latin American identity is suffering, constructed gradually since the independence of most of the Spanish colonies in the first part of the 19th century, makes it possible to understand hybrid proposals like those of Nadín Ospina. This Colombian artist has been exhibiting a series of works in which certain icons of the contemporary entertainment industry acquire the appearance of prehispanic figures, since the first decade of the 90s. Nadín Ospina has travelled America and its archaeological sites for 10 years, in search of the artisans that have kept alive the old traditions of pre-Columbian artistic production.

Nowadays a small army of ceramicists, goldsmiths, and jade and volcanic rock carvers make work for him from places as diverse as Mexico City, San José de Costa Rica, and Tumaco, on the Pacific coast of Columbia. This living heritage gives the work its force. Through the work's refined craft, the ideas that develop from a critical reflection of contemporary culture. Ospina directs the realisation of sculptures of characters such as Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and The Simpsons.



Nadín Ospina. *Pop-Colonialism. Series: Icons. 2001.*

The popular personalities of the cartoons, that can be considered emblems of the cultural colonialism of late capitalism, acquire an exotic and peripheric character. The reading of these objects under decolonial aesthetics seems explicit. The hybrid character of the pieces refers to the operations of re-signification that individuals of peripheral societies carry out with products of the hegemonic culture. The idea of 'cultural anthropophagy' layed out by Andrade in 1928 - of devouring foreign and alien cultures in order to return them, assimilated, into the material and essence of

ones own spirit - has not lost its validity.

The series *Icons* (2001), on the one hand puts in evidence the state of constant redefinition in which local cultures find themselves, as a consequence of global economic exchanges. On the other, however, its pieces have a paradoxical effect, with the artist converting the hegemonic into the exotic: these icons of Western culture are compared to the works of anonymous artists of native cultures, in order to acquire 'an other character'.



Nadín Ospina Xólotl. House 2005. Stone 68 x 42 x 39.

The decolonial vision works to deactivate the coordinates that define the centre and the periphery, through the recognition of individual histories. The question could now be reformulated in another manner: who represents whom? In a paradoxical way, the sculptures of Nadín Ospina allude to an exoticism that praises late capitalism - that of a domesticated alterity, that far from provoking fear, results in

a certain admiration. It is a desirable exoticism, removed of its essence that questions the pre-eminence of capitalism and its ideology. It is an alterity that doesn't generate conflicts, in which all, even dark skinned, black or white people, look enormously like Mickey Mouse or Bart Simpson. As a last resort, the proposals of Nadín Ospina, with all their exoticism, parodied the imperialist attitude to peripheral creation, as well as the passivity of people faced with imposed cultures. On this, Ospina (2003: 219) comments:

My work is concerned with cultural themes from my local environment and about general subjects of contemporary culture. I assume my works as social self-portraits that reveal the acculturation and highlight the influence and the control of mercantilist neocolonialism. A neocolonialism that appeals to the image and its strategies in order to conquer, through deceitful and perverse resources, a defenceless and stupidly grateful audience that is not even conscious of the plundering.

The decolonial demand here consists of highlighting the differentiating components of individual cultures in opposition to the discursive process of art, which shows itself today to be derived towards mere globality. A demand directed to that wide digestive mechanism that is mass culture. As Paula Maldonado (2011) asserts, decolonial aesthetics "looks to construct singularity in opposition to the homogenizing processes of economic globalization". Artistic works and cultural projects can put themselves in opposition to the hegemonic network and construct another model. However, this wouldn't be a model that looks at itself, but a model that has the

capacity to project itself and redefine the network of global art today. In other words, the alternative is not in imitating the models of the North and West, as the work of Ospina can be interpreted, but in the ability to return or invert the gaze, in order to oppose the domination of the colonial gaze.

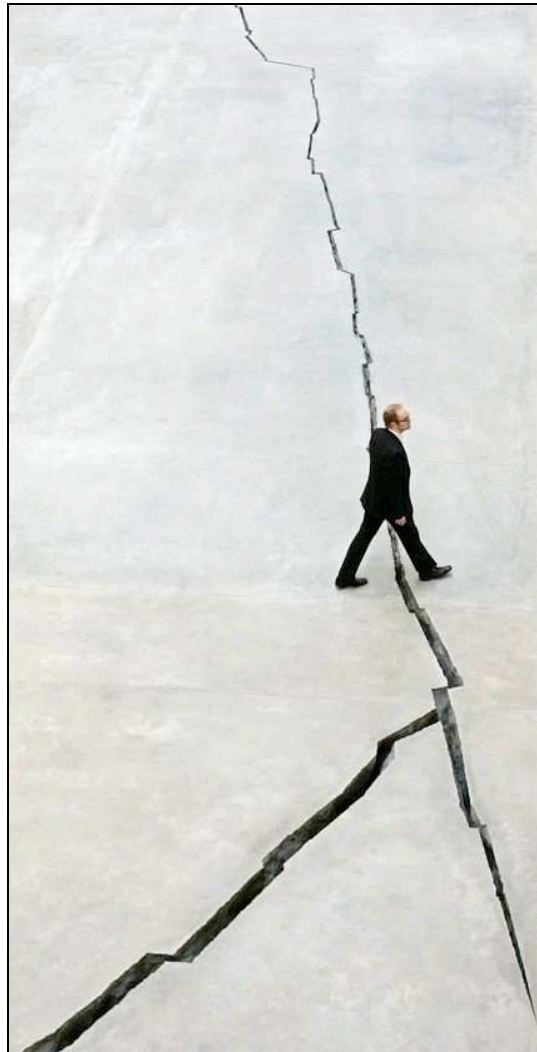
VII. - Decolonial Visions: Second Stage

At the beginning of 2007 the Tate Modern invited a Colombian artist, Doris Salcedo, to exhibit in the space known as the Turbine Hall, considered the temple of current art. She was the first Latin American artist to make work there. When the gallery was opened, surprisingly, it was apparently empty and on the shiny floor there was a crevice of 167 metres in length by 50cm in width. Salcedo had made a unique work: *Shibboleth* (2007). The title makes reference to a passage in the Old Testament that tells how the members of a tribe killed those of another tribe that pronounced this word in a different way. The fracture evokes the division of a society in the midst of a great desolation, which dramatically changes the perception of space. This crack in one of the most important galleries of the West represents the division of humanity, the abyss between distinct worlds, so close and yet so foreign. The monumental character of this work interacts with the architecture of the space, in which emptiness and desolation are converted into the principal actors, in order to suggest multiple associations grounded in collective imaginaries. There is a direct cultural and social reference - a crack that speaks of separation, exclusion, racism and slavery, made by an artist of the Third World in the cultural heart of Europe. According to critic Gonzalez Uribe (2010), the gaze of Salcedo is diverse and profound, looking towards the universe, which permits her to see her location within it. There is a certain type of personal experience that defines the world in which we live. What place does each

one of us occupy? What does it mean to be seen as a bearer of viruses, of crime, drugs, and contamination, with darker skin-colours than what is desired? In other words, what does it mean to be the bearer of everything that puts in danger the grand culture of Europe? Salcedo emphasizes the differences imposed by colonization. The crack seems to confirm – we are like the tail of the West, but we are Western. We were educated within the Western canon and we have no other option, therefore we form part of the West. We are its unrecognized and undesired appendice, but nevertheless, we are not from Western (Salcedo 2007).

Salcedo works from Latin America with the Western canons, the parameters established by Europe, and what she does in *Shibboleth* is to interact with them and break them. With this work, the gaze has become inverted: the western canon was constructed on the basis of the exploitation of other worlds. However, now it is not Europe that is constructing similar societies through its grand civilisations, but those civilisations that return to show their discontent, asserting themselves and reducing the European model of life to their measure. As Salcedo (2007) points out, in the presentation of the installation, her work is driven towards the representation of the long history of racism and colonialism that underlies the modern world, which excludes the considerations of those not able to form a part of it. Over hundreds of years, Western ideas of progress and prosperity have been supported by colonial exploitation and the withdrawal of the basic human rights of the subaltern. Our time, Salcedo states (2007), still continues to be defined by the existence of an underclass that experience great social exclusion, as much in the Western world as in postcolonial societies. The intention of the artist with *Shibboleth* has been precisely to show Europe what it is, what it has done, and how the immigrant lives. It points out that differences exist and that they cannot be negated, however much they are

ignored. These differences would always be the hidden face of the society of wellbeing, the origin and cause of social conflicts, so frequent in recent times.



Doris Salcedo. *Shibboleth* 2007. Photo: Tate

For Gonzalez Uribe (2010), the latent preoccupation in this work is the subaltern knowledge of what European culture means, a culture that has considered non-Europeans to be “uneducated, primitive, black and amoral”. This discourse has been maintained and now revolves around immigrants, which invade traditional European culture in order to form part of it. It is a tradition marked by racial hatred,

built on an exclusive world. One of the biggest critiques that emerged was the question of if the work would affect the structure of the Turbine Hall. What is certain is that the intention was to attack the structure, not of the gallery itself, but of the imposition of current canons, which instead of growing weaker, are increasing all the time.



Doris Salcedo. *Shibboleth* 2007. Photo: Tate

Through the fracturing of the museum, Salcedo expresses the fracture of modernity itself. The sculpture by the Colombian artist is a commentary about artistic institutions, as Salcedo (2007) asserts:

The museum and art in particular have played, throughout history, a very important role in defining an ideal of beauty, equally, an aesthetic ideal. This ideal is defined in such a strict form, that all non-whites are excluded.

Modernity has therefore constructed a scenario of power in which the 'Other' has been relegated to a position of inferiority and defined through the negation of

their own history. Therefore, we can assert that the installation of Doris Salcedo at the Tate, responds fully to the new proposals of decolonial aesthetics. In a subtle manner, expressed from the centre of the matrix of power itself, the exploitation initiated centuries ago is made evident, and we are reminded that it survives to this day. Shibboleth has left its decolonial footprint in a permanent way in the Tate Modern, epicenter of contemporary art. By request of the author, the floor of the gallery was not 'replaced', but on the contrary, 'repaired'. Therefore the scar opened by the crack can still be observed in the gallery, an injury that reminds us of the abysmal differences of time and space, where, even today, and perhaps more than ever, otherness is suffered.

In order to finish this brief exploration into of the praxis of decolonial aesthetics, I would like to make reference to the new practices of intervention in the social and local structure of many artists, who radically reformulate the role of creator, operating as cultural agents, community leaders, social workers, therapists, sociologists, anthropologists and ethnographers. Continuing to look at the visions taking shape across the Colombian artistic panorama, we can highlight *Proyecto Envoltura* (2009), created by the collective La Redhada. This collective¹⁶, formed of female artists, teachers and researchers of a region of the Colombian Caribbean, produces cultural projects concerned with gender. It should be pointed out that Caribbean culture is especially rooted in diversity. The European penetration of the region not only subjugated the indigenous population, but also introduced African slave labour in order to consummate its ideals. The coexistence of different ethnic

¹⁶ La Redhada collective 2010: Carolina Acosta, Martha Amorocho, Shirley Cabanas, Alexa Cuesta Flórez, Karina Herazo, Helena Martin Franco and Lisette Urquijo. Available from: <http://www.laredhada.org/>

groups is expressed in its artistic manifestations, encompassing a plurality of craft, music, myth, dance, beliefs, rites and magic, which today form their cultural identity. The fact that the first anti-slavery novels were published by women¹⁷ created an early proto-feminist rhetoric in the Colombian Caribbean in which the woman, subjugated by the patriarchal power of the epoch, establishes an emotional alliance with the slave, associating claims for their liberation with their own. Both the abolitionist as anti-patriarchal rhetoric gives rise to the postcolonial and feminist theories of current times. What's more, with discourses of globalization in mind, the Afro-Atlantic connection offers possibilities of global resistance that should not be underestimated. As Dominican curator Alanna Lockward (2010) asserts:

Visual discourses in the Caribbean navigate between these non-territories, going from resistance to the search of legitimacy, travelling simultaneously from the center to the periphery and vice versa, resisting their endemic invisibility while operating in the logic of decoloniality.

As a result of their research, a year after their formation, the collective La Redhada inaugurated their show *Introitus: Gender, Identity and Postcolonialism in the work of Women Artists of the Colombian Caribbean* (2010)¹⁸ in Cartagena de Indias, in which 32 creators were invited to explore their artistic concerns from a

¹⁷ In 1688: Aphra Behn published *Oroonoko, or The Royal Slave . A True Story* (London). In 1795: Madame de Staël published *Mirza, ou lettre d'un voyageur* (Paris). In 1823: Claire de Duras published in *Ourika*.(Paris). In 1841: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda published *Sab* (Madrid)
From : Antonio Benítez-Rojo. *El Caribe y la Conexión Afroatlántica*. Available from:
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¹⁸ Introitus catalogue: <http://laredhada.org/pdf/CatalogoIntroitus.pdf>

feminine point of view. *Introitus* is a medical term that comes from Latin (used in the English language) that means an entrance and refers to the vaginal orifice. As a threshold of the anatomy of a woman, the curatorial proposal aimed to retake that which is feminine and has been taken by masculine thought. In the exhibition, the artists propose a rebellion against the sexist and hegemonic academic structure that produces a creative gaze in which the woman is seen as muse, as object of desire or object of a religious/sinful gaze. The objectives of this project tackle, for the first time, the perspective of gender in the Caribbean context, and throw masculine cultural perceptions into question in order to initiate new conceptual approaches that bring the proposals of women artists of the Caribbean closer to Art History in its context.

From this perspective, the project lays out three structures: the questioning of stereotypes and religious conditioning, the representation of sexual identity, and the representation of postcolonial transcendence. The show offered the novelty that, for the first time, gender and decoloniality went hand in hand in order to question the stereotypes that had been imposed for centuries. In this way, this project takes the baton from the work initiated by Gayatri Spivak in her critique of a feminine subaltern subject, and represents Latin American particularity in its own alterity. The role of woman was defined by Spivak (1999:226) as:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization.

The decolonial significance of the Colombian proposal consists here in confronting the ancestral cultures in order to understand and assimilate their origins. For feminist decolonial discourse, the phenomenon of the reconstruction of sexual identity would be cemented in the liberty of expression of intimacy, existent social

Poster created to publicise the exhibition *Introitus* (2010)



Failed Acts. 2009. Carolina Acosta. Plotter and oil on canvas 100 x 70 cm

conditions and in the questioning of false morals or puritanism imposed by the historicist tradition, whose image of the woman is centered around masculine sexual desire, on maternity or on a submissive relation to the opposite sex. This idea responds to the decolonial attitude to epistemic disobedience since it revises and questions the ideas imposed by the West in order to confront its own.

In the vein of this approach, I would like to highlight the work of artist Helena Martin Franco, who performed a personality taken from fiction: Corazón Desfasado¹⁹ in *Introitus* (2010). The character is an invented saint that reflects a collage of identities and stereotypes, which manifests itself as a hybrid figure between religious iconography, pornography and the subjectivity of the artist.



Corazón Desfasado²⁰. Appearance. 2009.
Altar to pray for money. Helena Martin Franco.

The realization of videos and performances around this personality are inspired by the Catholic notion of the miraculous apparition. Each appearance of Corazón Desfasado on videos, posters, leaflets or in cyber form, is accompanied by a 'message of redemption' or 'miracles granted'. These messages reveal the communal places between the discourse of religion and commerce, showing the

¹⁹ Corazon Desfasado. Available from: <http://corazondesfasado.com/index.html>

²⁰ Available from: <http://www.corazondesfasado.com/dinero.html>

search for happiness and perfection, for 'cleansing' or 'purity' - ideals that demand sacrifices. As a result, Corazón Desfasado exhibits certain contemporary values; seduction, submission, lack of satisfaction, dependence and fear. Its principle appearances took place in public spaces and the Internet. In her last appearance, in *Introitus* (2010), she interprets the hymn²¹ of the city, with the help of a phallic ocarina of imitation pre-Colombian style, which is used today as a tourist souvenir. Conscious of the tonal limitations of this instrument, Corazón Desfasado embarks on the reconstruction of the hymn from memory.



Hymn according to Corazón Desfasado. Helena Martín Franco. Video (4' 24"). 2010

The action of trying to reproduce it reinforces the search for cultural identity that at the same time, puts in evidence a search for sexual identity. The subversion of symbols is converted here into a decolonialising action, since it is confronted by history codified by the West, in its formation of subjectivities, as is reflected by the imperialist project of modernity. The strategies of decolonial aesthetics aim to get around the imperial canons and instituted values. Art with decolonial concerns moves its centre from the mythic and theological act of 'creation', the paradigmatic figure of

²¹ Available from: <http://vimeo.com/20682120>

modernity, toward its own territory, expanded from its own archetypes. Decolonial art becomes a form of filtering and critically re-elaborating the varied and contradictory information of the world today, using a tool of thought and critical action that starts to affect general culture, producing reactions and awakening consciences. In summary, it is an aesthetic located on the theoretical horizon that permits the inquiry of art in a particular context, different to the models developed by the West.

VIII. - Final Considerations

If Modernity were the moment of constructing from Europe the image of the world, the corresponding response would be the artists and theorists of Latin American modernism. Since a decade ago, Latin American cultural studies as Castro-Gómez states (2005), have been configured in four different, although complimentary, projects: studies of cultural and political practices, cultural critique, subaltern studies and postcolonial studies, these last of which are in line with the work of Walter Mignolo and the group Modernity/Coloniality. Mignolo (2009:39) characterizes modernity as a European narrative that has a hidden, darker face: coloniality. The decolonial way of thinking and making has emerged as a response to the 'oppressive and imperialist' inclinations of the European modern ideals projected and applied in the non-European world. From here, the proposal of the 'decolonial turn' emerges as the result of thinking modernity as the 'coloniality of power, of knowledge and of being'. For Latin American critique, these colonialities of knowledge are based on epistemic principles and Western aesthetics, which have undermined the non-European canons for centuries, from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, from Modernity to Altermodernity. As Pedro Pablo Gómez (2010:30)

asserts, from the Eurocentric point of view, the world system is the consequence of European creativity and the “inter-imperial processes of expansion in the search of commercial routes”. As a result, the ‘discovery’ of America occurred, and the following process of colonization - a process governed by the economic dimension and by the hierarchies of colonial countries. However, from the point of view of the native groups, inhabitants of the land of Mother Earth, the interpretation of the colonializing process changes radically. This change of perspective situates the analysis in a new place, from which is reconfigured in ‘an other of enunciation’. It is the point of view that ‘saw arrive’, that gives place to new beginnings and new categories with profound epistemic, political, ethical and aesthetic implications. This gaze becomes the first condition for the construction of a decolonial perspective, which goes beyond the violent encounters that took place during colonization and that were prolonged in multiple ways in the present day.

For decolonial thought, the colonial matrix of power hides other networks that are also in correlation with other hierarchies. That would be the case with the aesthetic global hierarchy, which Mignolo (2010b) calls the imposition of the “aesthetic over aiesthesis”. For the author, global aesthetics is concerned not just with a concrete mode of seeing the world, but also a mode of establishing relations of control - whose end would be to maintain determined structures in the colonized societies, where the historical and epistemological evolution varies substantially with respect to hegemonic societies. Para Mignolo (2009) the power of the aesthetic dimension initiated in modernity is strengthened through the institution of the museum and later in the successive aesthetics conceptualized by the West, which continue attending to their own sensorial experience. As Gómez (2010:32) points out,

the global aesthetic hierarchy, before being a particular mode of seeing, is a “mode of making see”, and in this relationship with the other hierarchies of power, it establishes the distinction between the visible and the invisible. The aesthetic global hierarchy therefore, is a regime of vision and at the same time a system of Invisibility of originary people and cultures, traditionally degraded by the West.

The exhibition *Decolonial Aesthetics* held in (2010), as well as being an exhibition of art, was a theoretical declaration against altermodern aesthetics put forward by Europe. Altermodernity, defined by Bourriaud (2010b) as a “global aesthetic”, proposes, from the perspective of multiculturalism, a local response to the ‘globalised culture’. A global world, according to the author, where real time communication and information, travel, immigration and frontiers transform the manner of understanding and inhabiting the world. In response to this statement, Decolonial discourse establishes itself as a resistance, in defence of the existence of ‘an other thinking’ and ‘an other feeling’, from the common wound provoked by coloniality. Against the new planetary movement that Bourriaud (2010a) calls *criollization*, decolonial aesthetics advocates for a creative transfiguration allowing independence of thought to emerge. It also advocates for a transmodern world, which was defined by Dussel (2004:18) as follows:

‘Trans-modernity’ indicates all the aspects that are situated ‘beyond’ (and also ‘prior to’) the structures valorised by a modern, European-North American culture, that are in force in the present in the grand universal non-European cultures and that have been put in movement towards a pluriversal utopia.

Decolonial aesthetics justifies its ideas with the assertion that the aesthetic hierarchy participated in an internal logic of coloniality and is also constitutive of global power. From the decolonial point of view the critique of European and North American aesthetic theories is based on the fact that they configure their parameters on the colonial matrix of power, making use of the prevailing aesthetic as a mechanism of collective conception. There is something that singularizes it even more in its comparison with the recent aesthetic put forward from Europe. As Spanish critic Fernando Castro Flórez (2011) has pointed out, Altermodernity is a vision of the epoch and, in particular, current artistic tendencies, that is keen to create a general global picture. According to Castro Flórez, the altermodern idea is constructed on the fragmentation of theoretical discourse. The singularity of decolonial aesthetics is rooted in the pertinence of its theoretical proposal, which situates itself on a solidly constructed critical current, that spans the contributions of thinkers that are heterogeneous in time and discipline. In this way decolonial aesthetics gives the artist the possibility to unite theory with material experience, in order to generate a critical instance.

We believe then, that the alternative offered in the form of the Latin American school of thought works out to be solid - a position founded in critical decolonial thought, elaborated from the other side, in order to question the hegemonic paradigms and offer alternatives. Given the continental location of my present project, part of its objective would be to represent a small attempt to call attention to the importance of this perspective, quite ignored in the Anglo-Saxon academic world. In addition, it would be fitting to highlight the need for a curatorial event, as *Altermodernity* at the Tate, which explored these ideas and exhibited different decolonial artistic practices, permitting the re-assertion of the soundness of their new

claims.

Analysing some artworks under the prism of decolonial aesthetics, we have tried to check the theoretical validity of its foundations, since the artist, outside the academic world and the dominant institutions, is able to add a dissenting point of view. The work of art is situated here at a crossroads between different modes of thought, ideologies, practices and ways of seeing the world, that generate an external and subaltern critique of modernity, a perspective excluded (or at least, ignored) as a result of colonial difference. Therefore, the intention of decolonialising aesthetics is to offer alternatives to this universalising European gaze of concepts, of which, artists of decolonial conscience come to form a part. We can assert that the aesthetic option of decolonial thought shows its validity through an anti-Eurocentric critique, not necessarily an anti-European one, which would make possible the decolonialisation of a surviving critical tradition. In the majority of cases, authors and theories don't look beyond the hierarchies that are in force in their own systems, that is to say the racisms, patriarchy, and other categories that perpetuate, in a hidden manner, the coloniality of power.

In summary, the option of decolonial aesthetics would be validated as a new instrument to express dissenting statements from perceptions that have been considered as subaltern, and that nowadays aspire to be visualized and integrated as themselves with the other cosmovision that inhabit the world.

13.815 words

Final Mark: Distinction

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